

# 10

## Kula Gharañī Sutta

The Discourse on the House-mistress | S 9.8

Or **Ogāḷha Sutta** The Discourse on Having Plunged

Theme: The arhat may be with the world, but is not of the world

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2013

### 1 Commentarial story

The Commentary relates that once a monk, having received a meditation subject from the Buddha himself, enters a jungle grove for his practice. On the second day, he enters a village for alms, a charming and radiant figure.

A certain family, impressed by his demeanour, saluted him with the fivefold rests,<sup>1</sup> and offered him almsfood. After listening to the monk's post-meal thanksgiving, the family is even more inspired by him. They decide to offer him his daily alms-meal on a regular basis.

The monk accepts this, and nourished in this way, he well exerts effort so that he attains arhathood. He thinks,

“Of great good is this family to me. What need is there for me to go anywhere else?”<sup>2</sup>

Then, right there, he dwells cultivating the joy of the attainment of fruit of arhathood. (SA 1:295)

### 2 Sutta significance

**2.1 COMMENTARY.** The monk in the Sutta, having obtained a meditation subject from the Buddha, goes into solitary retreat. However, on his almsround, his radiant personality gains the devotion of the house-mistress, the head of the family. She is so inspired by the monk that she decides to give regular almsfood (*nicca,dāna*) to him. This offering facilitates the monk's spiritual endeavour so that he quickly attains arhathood.

A deity in the same jungle grove, thinks that the monk (now an arhat) is socializing with the house mistress, and decides to admonish him. The awakened monk, however, replies by advising the deity not to listen to rumours, so that his mind is not defiled. [§6]

If we are easily shaken by rumours, we become like a timid animal in the forest. Our minds will become uncertain and unfocused, so that our spiritual practice is affected [§7]. Since the monk is now an arhat, he is untroubled by any rumours.

The import of this Sutta is that an awakened one is able to relate to the laity without being enmeshed in worldliness.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, by giving the house-mistress an opportunity to offer alms to him, he is allowing her to accumulate great merits for herself and her family.

#### **2.2 KULA GHARAÑĪ.**

**2.2.1 Kula.** No Pali dictionaries list the phrase *kula gharañī*. The first component, *kula*, means “clan, family,” or, as an adjective, “of good family,” as in *kula,putta*, “son of family, noble youth (of whatever family).”<sup>4</sup> A well known example of this is “Yasa the son of family” (*yasa kula,putta*).<sup>5</sup> Sigala of **the Sigal’ovāda Sutta** (D 31), however, is called a “young houselord” (*gaha.pati,putta*).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Salutation with fivefold rests” (or “five-pointed salutation”), *pañca.patiṭṭhita*, ie prostrating with the forehead, the two palms and the knees on the ground.

<sup>2</sup> *Bahūpakāraṃ me etaṃ kulāṃ, aññattha gantvā kiṃ karissāmi?*

<sup>3</sup> Cf Dh 125: If there were no wound in one's hand, | one may carry poison. || Poison affects not one without a wound. | nor bad affects one who does no evil. ||

<sup>4</sup> **Yasa** (V 1:15,1); **Ambaṭṭha** (D 1:93,20); general ref (M 1:85,31 + 192,5); A 2:249,11; Kvu 268,17; DhA 1:88; BA 19. Cf (German) Haussohn. For its other meanings, usages, compounds, and refs, see DP: *kula*. See SD 18.2b n on *kula,putta*.

<sup>5</sup> On **Yasa the noble youth**, see SD 11.2.

<sup>6</sup> The reason is obvious: he is a layman, son of a houselord, and never renounced: D 31,1.2 @ SD 4.1.

In the **Dhātu Vibhaṅga Sutta** (M 140), Pukkusāti is referred to as *kula,putta*, “noble son” or “son of family,” but this does not mean that he is a young man, for it is merely a designation for one who comes from a respectable family.<sup>7</sup> Vakkali, who joins the order as a young man, is similarly referred to *kula,putta*, even posthumously.<sup>8</sup>

**2.2.2 Gharanī** (Amg *ghariṇā*;<sup>9</sup> BHS *gharini*) comes from the word *ghara*, “house,” and means “housewife, lady or mistress of the house.”<sup>10</sup> So the compound *kula gharanī* means “mistress of the clan, house-mistress, house-lady” here, signifying a large or noble (and wealthy) family. Clearly, the family in the Kula Gharanī Sutta must be a wealthy one to be able to feed the monk on a daily basis.

2.3 THE ANTELOPE PARABLE. The closing **verse 7** says, “**But if one is shaken by sounds, | like an antelope in a forest, || then, one is said to be soft-hearted: | one’s vow [practice] is not accomplished.** ||” Here, the Pali for “antelope” is *vāta,miga*, which literally translates as “wind-deer.”<sup>11</sup>

The Commentary explains that just as an antelope in the forest is frightened by the sound of the wind rustling in the leaves, so it is with one frightened by sounds (by rumours and gossips). Similarly, the practice of one who is “soft-hearted” (*lahu,citta*) (that is, fickle or unresolute) fails. (SA 1:295)

**2.4 VATA [§7d]**. The word *vata* (Vedic *vrata*), meaning (1) “a religious duty, observance, rite, practice, custom,” or (2) “manner of (behaving like) a certain animal (as a practice of ascetics).” Its best known usage is in the compound *sīla-b.bata parāmāsa*, “attachment to rituals and vows,”<sup>12</sup> which is one of the first three of the “10 fetters” (*dasa samyojana*).<sup>13</sup> Breaking these 3 fetters brings about streamwinning,<sup>14</sup> the beginning of the journey on the path to full self-awakening.<sup>15</sup>

In most cases, it is used in a negative sense, but is here used in a positive Buddhist sense, where it can be translated simply as “practice.”<sup>16</sup> Another case of this usage is found in the **Sīla-b,bata Sutta** (A 3.-78).<sup>17</sup> In other words, such a positive usage is rare in the suttas.

### 3 Related suttas

**3.1 THE SĪLA-B,BATA SUTTA** (A 3.78) defines a successful “essential practice and vow” (*sīla-b,bata ...upaṭṭhāna,sāra*) as one where “unwholesome qualities decline and wholesome qualities increase.”<sup>18</sup> Here, the word *vata*, “observance or practice,” is used in a positive sense. It is one of the words for Dharma-centred practice, whose goal is awakening.

**3.2 THE (LĀBHA,SAKKĀRA,SILOKA) BHIKKHU SUTTA** (S 17.30) is a short discourse where the Buddha declares that gain, honour and praise (*lābha,sakkāra,siloka*) are terrible obstacles to the attainment of “pleasant dwellings here and now,” that is, the attainment of dhyanas. Gain, honour and praise have to do with the world, and worldliness is certainly unhelpful, too, even detrimental, to meditation, especially the attaining of dhyana.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> M 140 @ SD 17.2a (4).

<sup>8</sup> See **Vakkali S** (S 22.87,39/3:124), SD 8.8.

<sup>9</sup> Pischel, *A Grammar of the Prakrit Languages* (tr Jha), §385 (p316).

<sup>10</sup> V 1:271; S I.201; Pv 3:1.9 (= *ghara,sāminī*, PvA 174,16); DhA 3:209. See DP: *gharanī*.

<sup>11</sup> See **Vāta,miga J** (J 14) which centres around an antelope (J 14/1:156-159).

<sup>12</sup> For details, see SD 40a.8 (5).

<sup>13</sup> On the 10 fetters, see **Udakūpama Sutta** (A 7.15/4:11-15), SD 28.6.

<sup>14</sup> See **Samanupassanā S** (S 22.47/3:46 f), SD 26.12 & **Entering the stream**, SD 3.3 (5.1).

<sup>15</sup> On the breaking of the 3 fetters, see **Emotional independence**, SD 40a.8.

<sup>16</sup> For further details, see SD 40a.8 (5.1.3).

<sup>17</sup> A 3.78/1:225 @ SD 79.10.

<sup>18</sup> A 3.78 @ SD 79.10.

<sup>19</sup> S 17.30/2:239 @ SD 110.4.

## The Discourse on the House-mistress

S 9.8

### A monks goes into retreat

- 1 On one occasion a certain monk was dwelling in a certain jungle grove in Kosala.
- 2 Now at that time that monk was dwelling intimately involved with a certain family.<sup>20</sup>

### A deity warns the monk

- 3 Then a deity who was staying in that jungle grove, felt compassion for that monk, desiring his good.<sup>21</sup> Wishing to arouse a sense of urgency in that monk, he assumed the form of the house-mistress.<sup>22</sup>
- 4 Then he approached that monk, and addressed him in verse, thus:

[The deity:]

- 5 *Nadī, tīresu saṅṭhāne  
sabhāsu rathiyāsu ca,  
janā saṅgamma mantenti  
mañ ca tañ ca kim antaran'ti.*

On the river banks, in the rest-house,  
in the meeting-halls, and along the carriage paths,  
people meeting one another wonder  
about what's going on with you and I.

### The arhat monk's reply

[The monk:]

- 6 *Bahūhi saddā paccūhā<sup>23</sup>  
khamitabbā tapassinā.  
Na tena maṅku hotabban  
hi tena kilissati.*
- 7 *Yo ca sadda, parittāsī  
vane vāta, migo yathā  
lahu, citto'ti taṃ āhu  
nāssa sampajjate vatan'ti.*

Many are words of contrary sounds  
that an ascetic must be patient with.  
One should not be troubled by that,  
for one is not defiled on that account.

But if one is shaken by sounds,  
like an antelope in a forest,  
then, one is said to be soft-hearted:<sup>24</sup>  
one's vow [practice] is not accomplished.

— evaṃ —

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<sup>20</sup> *Tena kho pana samayena so bhikkhu aññatarasmim kule ativelam ajjh'ogā[ha-p,atto viharati.*

<sup>21</sup> *Atha kho yā tasmim vana, saṅḍe adhivatthā devatā tassa bhikkhuno anukampikā attha, kāmā,*

<sup>22</sup> *Taṃ bhikkhum saṃvejetu, kāmā yā tasmim kule kula, gharaṇī,*

<sup>23</sup> *Paccūhā:* (cp late Skt *pratyūha* = *praty* + √UH, to consider) an impediment, obstacle (S 1:201), which Comy glosses by “contrary words” (*paṭiloma, saddā*, SA 1:295); J 6:571.

<sup>24</sup> “Soft-hearted,” *lahu, citto*, lit “light-minded,” ie easily distracted, timid (J 3:73).